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AUTHOR LeGrand, Raymond A.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to re-educate veteran teachers to understand and conceptualize child-centered, informal education as preparation for a new, open-architecture setting. The first phase of the project consisted of a needs assessment; the second, of three training days for teachers. Training covered interpersonal relations skills, classroom environment analysis and diagnosis, visiting and evaluating open schools, formulating generalizations about informal education, and exposure to resources available on informal education. The third phase consisted of a planning day with three or four teachers to prepare for the simulation. In phase 4, each cluster of teachers moved with their classes into an all-purpose room designed to simulate the space and equipment in the new school. Following the simulation, each cluster met for phase 5 in which the teachers and consultants debriefed the experience and set goals for what they wanted to accomplish in the new school. Phase 6 consisted of 18 days of followup in the new building. Evaluation results indicated that teacher attitudes about the new school have changed from ones of doubt, anxiety, and low expectation to more positive ones. (Author)

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TEACHER RENEWAL FOR INFORMAL EDUCATION:

A COOPERATIVE IN-SERVICE TRAINING MODEL

Submitted by

Raymond A. LeGrand, Ed.D.
Sally H. Wertheim, Ph.D.
John Carroll University

Belva Singer
Cleveland Heights-University Heights
City School District
December, 1975

Raymond A. LeGrand
AACTE Chief Institutional Representative

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SUMMARY

The purpose of this project was to re-educate veteran teachers to understand and conceptualize child-centered, informal education as preparation for a new, open architecture setting. The first phase of the project consisted of a needs assessment. The second phase consisted of three training days for teachers. Training covered: interpersonal relations skills, classroom environment analysis and diagnosis, visiting and evaluating open schools, formulating generalizations about informal education, and exposure to resources available on informal education.

The third phase consisted of a planning day with three or four teachers to prepare for the simulation, an actual testing-out experience in open-space.

In phase four, each cluster of teachers moved into an all-purpose room with their classes. Teachers and students worked in an environment designed to simulate the space and equipment in the new school.

Following the simulation, each cluster met for phase five where the teachers and the consultants debriefed the experience and set goals for what they want to accomplish in the new school. The consultants did a sociogram upon which recommendations for clustering in the new school were made.

Phase six consisted of 18 days of follow-up in the new building.

Evaluation indicated that teacher attitudes about the new school have changed from ones of doubt, anxiety, and low expectation to ones that are positive.

COMPREHENSIVE EXPLANATION

Description and Development of the Program

Given the condition of aurplus of teachers, teacher education literature and programs are all reflecting interest in teacher renewal. Traditionally in-service education has taken the format of graduate education, after school programs, or summer workshops. Often these prove to be ineffective in achieving any long-term change goals for school systems or individuals. If in-service education is to strongly effect teacher attitudes, it must be made part of the total curriculum improvement in schools, not relegated to the status of an extra activity. Alternative modes for in-service education must be developed as both universities and school systems work together. Such a model was developed cooperatively by John Carroll University and the Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District for the purpose of retraining veteran teachers moving from traditional classrooms to new informal, open-space elementary schools. In effect, the university went to school.

Assumptions Underlying the Training Design

(1) The university faculty were involved on a full-time basis. (2) Modeling the kind of behavior that would be expected of the teachers in the new environment was important. A two-member university team would model cooperating teaching. (3) The teachers were exposed to learning and teaching styles appropriate to their new environment: facilitator, helper, conflict manager, resource person, active experimenter, and reflective observer. (4) Building a high trust level and establishing good relationships was important. (5) People needed to interact in a social as well as a technical context. (6) Learner expectations for the new setting made a difference in the final result.

Description of Training Design (See Model on Page 4)

The in-service project to prepare veteran teachers to work in a new, open architecture setting began when the superintendent asked the university to develop

a training program for teachers in informal education. He had previously obtained a grant from the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation to cover the costs of a full-time university faculty member for a full public school semester and for five days of substitute time to release each teacher. The first phase of the project consisted of a needs assessment with each teacher conducted by the university team. A final contract, objectives, and schedule were negotiated and provided the basis for the training.

The second phase consisted of three training days where teachers were released all day by substitutes to work with the consultants. Training covered such areas as: interpersonal relations skills, classroom environment analysis and diagnosis, visiting and evaluating open schools, formulating generalizations about informal education, and exposure to resources available on informal education. The generalizations formulated and later reevaluated were to become the basic underlying tenets of the expected change.

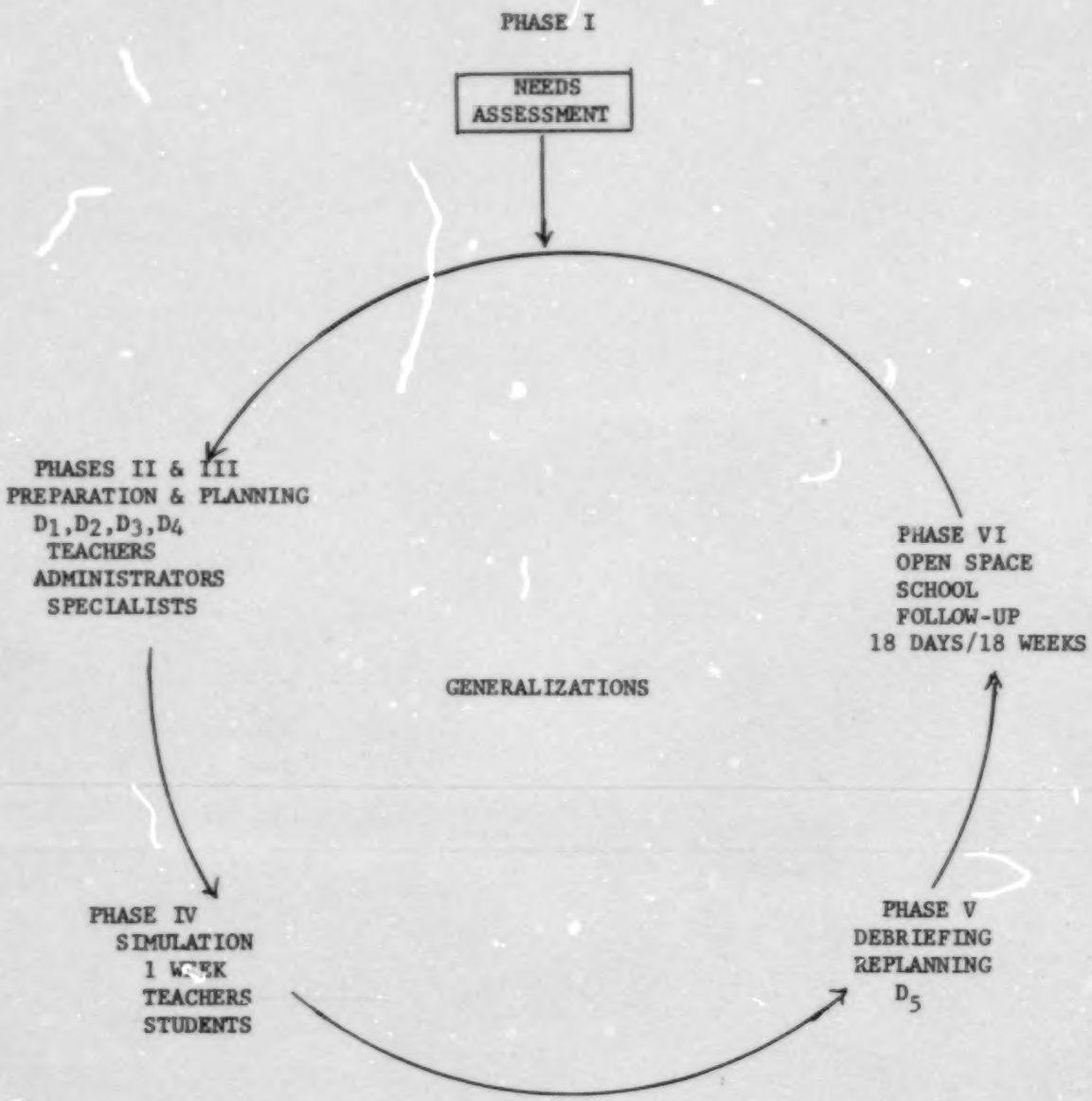
The third phase consisted of planning for the simulation experience based upon the individual needs of each cluster of three to four teachers. Room arrangements, schedules, and learning activities were planned. Each cluster tried some new, cooperative learning experiences. The simulation experience was to be a high-risk, testing-out, though, non-judgmental environment.

Phase four was designated as the simulation experience. Six clusters of student teachers participated for one week each. Conditions such as open space, new furniture, new materials, and the larger numbers of people were all set up to give the participants a feeling of how the conditions in the new setting would be.

Following the simulation, each cluster met with the consultants for phase five away from school on the university campus to evaluate and set goals for the new school. They also discussed the use of 18 days of consultant follow-up time during the next school year. Based upon a request of the teachers, the consultants developed a sociogram which was used with the teachers, on a voluntary basis, to ascertain their choices about clusters for the new building. During this time, orientation was also done with parents on formal and informal levels.

Phase six occurred in the new building. The consultants were available for a total of 18 days during the first school year that the new building was open to help with scheduling, planning, observation, feedback, conferencing, and mainly institutionalizing a support system.

A TRAINING MODEL (See Diagram)



Objectives[1]

1. To reeducate veteran teachers to understand and conceptualize ideas of child-centered, informal education.
2. To prepare staff to work in a new, open architecture setting.
3. To assist the staff in developing necessary interpersonal skills.
4. To establish a common perceptual background about informal education.
5. To assist the staff in interpreting and relating the existing curriculum to an open-space school.
6. To develop and use planning skills in the new environment.
7. To relate the project to the school community.
8. To formulate and accept a set of working generalizations about informal education appropriate for the new school.

Personnel Involved

Total elementary school staff; two university consultants.

Total Budget

$11,300

Contributions to the Improvement of Teacher Education

The model developed here as an alternative to the traditional methods of in-service training can be used in other and different ways. Though it was successful in training teachers for an informal open-space school, other types of training purposes formulated through a needs assessment may be easily substituted, using the same training design and basic assumptions about training. The important consideration is that in-service become a high priority item wherein the resources of school systems and universities are used cooperatively with mutual respect resulting in mutual benefit. Universities can and should go to schools.

[1]These purposes evolved as a result of the needs assessment done with the staff and were agreed to by them.

Evaluation Methods and Results

An opinionnaire based on program objectives was used to determine teacher reaction to the training. Most teachers expressed positive feelings about the project, and felt it had helped to change their attitudes, had achieved the stated objective, and showed a high level of awareness concerning the issues involving informal, open-education.